

**Only the Least of Me Is Hostage: Midwest POWs in Nazi
Germany/Behind Barbed Wire: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany**

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man soldiers in two German prisoner of war newspapers published at Camp Algona, Iowa, during World War II. With the help of a team of German-language translators, Luick-Thrams offers a captivating look into the daily lives of German POWs, from art and poetry to sports and literature. These newspapers are presented in the words of the German prisoners who wrote them, initially the 1944 pro-Nazi paper *Drahtpost*, and then later, in 1945, the anti-Nazi paper *Lagerzeitung*.

Not only does *Camp Papers/Lagerzeitungen* give casual readers an intriguing firsthand look at German POWs in Iowa, but the colorful POW descriptions of life and labor in many of Iowa's smaller branch camps, from Eldora to Muscatine, also contribute significantly to historical scholarship on the subject. Luick-Thrams states, "Ultimately, *Camp Papers/Lagerzeitungen* is about human growth" (168), but it may be more about the success of the U.S. government's secret attempt to reeducate enemy prisoners of war. Luick-Thrams found that Algona's POW newspapers shifted from an overtly pro-Nazi position to an anti-Nazi position. In 1945 the Provost Marshall General's Office cited that shift as "fitting the purpose of the re-education program" (Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, 205). Although it does not explicitly tackle the subject of reeducation, this book, like Ron Robin's *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II* (1995) and Arthur L. Smith's *The War for the German Mind: Re-Educating Hitler's Soldiers* (1996), demonstrates the U.S. government's successful attempt to build the foundation for a democratic Germany here in the United States.

Only the Least of Me Is Hostage: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany, edited by Michael Luick-Thrams, with text and illustrations by Pat Schultz. 2 volumes. 270 + 171 pp. Illustrations by Pat Schultz and Rayf Schmidt. Mason City: TRACES, 2004. \$17.50 paper each or both for \$30.00.

Behind Barbed Wire: Midwest POWs in Nazi Germany, edited by Michael Luick-Thrams and Pat Schultz, with illustrations by Pat Schultz and Rayf Schmidt. 60 pp. Mason City: TRACES, 2004. \$5.00 paper. Both publications available only through www.TRACES.org.

Reviewer Arnold Krammer is professor of history at Texas A&M University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on World War II and prisoners of war, including *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*; *Hitler's Last Soldier in America* (with Georg Gaertner), and *Undue Process: The Untold Story of America's German Enemy Internees*.

How fascinating to view the Second World War through Iowa's eyes—through the eyes of our friends and neighbors and relatives who left

their homes and farms, some called by patriotism, others by the excitement of travel and adventure, and still others because they simply received a form letter from President Roosevelt. Whatever called them to go to war, thousands fell into enemy hands and spent the war years in Nazi prisoner of war camps. The first large group of soldiers to arrive in Europe was from the Midwest, members of the 34th "Red Bull" Division from Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Consequently, midwesterners became the first wave of German war prisoners. Their horrific experiences, the brutality, terror, starvation, boredom, despondency, and homesickness, often lasting two or three years until liberation, are unimaginable to us today. Many were recovering from wounds sustained in battle or parachuting out of a stricken plane, and an unfortunate number did not recover. They were our fathers and grandfathers. What sustained them? How did their experiences affect the rest of their lives and help mold us to become what we are?

To collect their recollections before they recede into the mist, Michael Luick-Thrams, a one-time Iowa farm boy turned Peace Corps veteran and world traveler, has created a small non-profit organization called TRACES (www.TRACES.org), which he has promoted into a burgeoning organization with an increasingly important impact. In addition to locating firsthand information from midwesterners in German and Austrian hands, as well as about German POWs in Iowa, Luick-Thrams is making history available through books, conferences, tours of German POW camps in the Midwest, a newsletter, a traveling exhibit, a German Culture Fest, and lots of publicity. TRACES' higher purpose is to encourage international understanding and to stimulate an appreciation of German-Austrian culture, although the inclusion of a facsimile of a Hitler Youth card on the organization's Web site gives one pause.

The three books under discussion—rather two books and a catalog—are wonderful collections of primary sources: letters home, postwar recollections, poems, drawings, diary excerpts, even recipes, newspaper articles, and telegrams, all made available by former POWs and their families, some after a lifetime of silence. The resulting two volumes, separated into "Soldiers" and "Airmen," offer fascinating insight into the lives and personal experiences of midwestern representatives of what Tom Brokaw called "the greatest generation." This is local history at its very best.

Luick-Thrams and Schultz have created an attractive and highly informative pair of books that should be of interest to midwesterners and history buffs alike; they provide a window into our past and an opportunity to understand the forces that defined and molded our parents and, consequently, ourselves.

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